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Three Wise Men

... And A Star

Chen Wen-guang

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SOME nineteen centuries ago there came three wise men from the east, saying, "We have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." Ever since the beginning of time, the influences which have moved the world forward have developed around the personalities of individuals. The swift-moving events which today are transforming the Orient can best be comprehended by observing some of the individuals who are playing significant parts in this latest drama of history. Here is the story of three young men of China, each of whom bears the surname Chen. Each has, in his own way, proven himself a wise man. And each has been led by the same star of inspiration as guided the Magi to the cradle in Bethlehem.



Late one night some twenty-odd years ago a young Chinese student, Chen Wen-yuan, paced restlessly about the campus of the Anglo-Chinese College in Foochow. For days something had been troubling him deeply—something he did not quite understand. Not many months before, he had come to the College firmly resolved to make the most of all the educational advantages of the institution, but to maintain an aloof and even hostile attitude toward the religious life and activities of the campus. But gradually he had begun to feel dissatisfied, and uncertain of himself.

Everyone had been friendly and cordial. His instructors had given him their best in the classroom, and had taken a personal interest in him on the campus. His fellow students had made him welcome, had made a place for him in their

activities. No compulsion had been placed on him to take any part in the religious life of the College community except as he himself might elect. To both his teachers and his fellows, Christianity seemed a way of life, and not merely a matter of outward forms and ceremonies.

One day Chen Wen-yuan had accompanied a group of Christian students going to a nearby village to hold an evangelistic service. He was standing apart from the group, taking no part in its activities, when an educated skeptic in the crowd of listeners began to attack their exposition of Christianity. So effective were his arguments that he triumphed over the students one after another.

Chen Wen-yuan was a keen student of logic, and loved to debate. He had studied the Christian religion from the standpoint of philosophy. As he listened, a thought had come to him: "I can answer those arguments. Why don't I go after him, just for the fun of it."

Suddenly he was on his feet, using all his talents of logic, wit, and convincing argument against the skeptic who had interrupted the service. In a few minutes he was master of the situation. The interrupter was silenced and the crowd was on his side. It had been great fun.

But later that evening, alone in his room, it had not been fun. He began to realize what a hypocrite he had been. A voice within him seemed to say, "If your arguments are so irresistible, why don't you truly accept Christianity, instead of making a mockery of it?"

And so it was that Chen Wen-yuan's struggle with himself had driven him from his room to pace restlessly about the campus. At last he sought out one of his American teachers. They talked—then prayed—together. From that time, he became a Christian leader of the student body.

After his graduation, he served for a time as social secretary in the Foochow Institutional Church, and as Principal of the Tsing Daik School. Despite very limited resources, he came to America and enrolled in Syracuse University. He not only secured his B.A. and M.A. degrees, but served



Dr. Chen Wen-yuan and his family.

as instructor at the same time.

In 1919 he returned to Foochow and became superintendent of the Foochow Institutional Church, and later pastor of the Foochow Student Church. Governor Sah Chen-ping of Fukien Province appointed him a personal advisor. The Chinese government invited him to Peking to accept an attractive government position at four times his meager salary as a pastor, but he declined the offer.

In 1921 his health broke down as a result of overwork and forgetfulness of his own physical needs. After a protracted illness he recovered and returned to his pastoral duties. A little later he became a lecturer on religious education at Fukien Christian University.

In 1927 Chen Wen-yuan was able, with the generous assistance of a member of the Fukien Board of Trustees, to come to America for postgraduate work. For three years he studied social psychology under the direction of William McDougall, for a time in Duke University, and later at Cambridge University, the University of Paris, and Berlin University. Dr. McDougall has described him as one

of the most brilliant students of any nationality whom it has ever been his privilege to instruct.

He received his Ph.D. degree in 1930, and shortly thereafter returned to Fukien Christian University, an abler administrator and a more devoted Christian leader than before. From all over China he began to receive calls to come as a speaker and leader at religious conferences and retreats. He became a prominent figure in the Youth and Religion Movement. He continued his work of teaching and administration at Fukien Christian University, and during the visit of President Lin Ching-jun to America in 1934-35 was the Acting President of the institution.

During the past year the missionary leaders of the world have begun to focus their attention on preparation for the great World Missionary Conference to be held in China during 1938. When the National Christian Council of China sought the ablest leader it could find to take charge of the tremendous task of preparing for this conference, the members of the Council turned with one accord to Dr. Chen Wen-yuan. At present he is on temporary leave of absence from Fukien, giving himself wholly to this difficult and challenging task, resolved that this first worldwide missionary conference to be held in the Orient shall mark an important new step in the coming of Christ's kingdom throughout the earth.



At the end of January, 1925, Theodore Chen, one of the most popular young Chinese students at Teachers College, Columbia, was just completing an excellent first semester of graduate work, when he became ill. The doctors diagnosed tuberculosis and advised that he be given sanatorium treatment at once. His own resources were too limited to meet the heavy expense involved. But, under the leadership of Bishop John Gowdy, then President of Fukien Christian University, a little group of Fukien Trustees and other American friends quietly contributed suffi-

cient funds to send him to Loomis Sanatorium in the Catskills, and to provide treatment for him there.

For awhile he appeared to be making progress. Then his case took a sudden turn for the worse, and it seemed that "Teddy" Chen's career was about to close just as it was beginning.

An active career it had been, and one that had promised much for the future. After doing preparatory work at Foochow College, he had entered Fukien Christian University in the autumn of 1918. He quickly became a leader both in his academic work and in the student activities of the campus. He was the editor-in-chief of the college paper, "The Fukien Star."

He was popular alike with his fellow students and his teachers, an ardent patriot, and an earnest Christian. Following his graduation in 1922, he taught for two years in the Anglo-Chinese College, Foochow. Then he came to America, and began the study at Teachers College which had so tragically been cut short. And within eighteen months after he reached New York he lay at the point of death at the sanatorium in the Catskills.

Skilled medical and surgical attention carried him almost



Dean Theodore Chen with his family on the beautiful Fukien campus.

miraculously past the crisis. Courageously he began again the hard, discouraging climb back to health and strength. Funds ran low again and again, but always friends came forward to replenish them.

Finally, in the autumn of 1928, Teddy was able to leave the sanatorium. Despite the advice of friends that he start back to China at once and avoid the strain which further study in New York might involve, he enrolled in Teachers College, and in 1929 received his Master's degree.

He went back to his alma mater, Fukien Christian University, as an Associate Professor in Education. In 1931 he was appointed Dean of the University, a position which he has continued to occupy with distinction. His health has remained good, he is an indefatigable worker, and he is one of the best-loved members of the staff.



During a night of storm when Francis Chen was an undergraduate at Fukien Christian University, passing boatmen deposited on the river bank just below the college a passenger in the last stages of cholera. Francis, then President of the Christian Association, fearlessly risking the danger of contracting the dread disease, carried the sufferer to a nearby building, provided him with a blanket, gave him a cup of hot tea, and sat with him until he died. Then he dug a grave, and held a funeral service. All this he did for a perfect stranger, whose name he never knew.

The act was typical of Francis Chen. Born in humble surroundings, his boyhood was lived on intimate terms with privation and hardship. He was sixteen years of age before he attended his first school. His fellows had a long "head start" of him in their studies, but perhaps none of them could have matched him in grit. The elementary grades, middle school, and at last his course at Fukien Christian University, all represented a long, difficult struggle which few boys would have attempted, and even fewer would have completed.

But from before the time when he was old enough to define what Christian love meant, Francis Chen has consistently lived as one who loves his fellowmen. Service without stint has been a habit which he has never broken. Difficult though his own struggle has been, he was always finding ways to assist other hard-pressed students.

Just as Francis was approaching graduation at Fukien Christian University in 1927, a generous American friend visiting the campus was so impressed by his spirit and his ability that he made it possible for the lad to go on to Yenching University. There he secured in the next three years the degrees of Master of Arts and Bachelor of Divinity.

Even then he was not content. Making his way to America, he enrolled in Yale University for graduate work leading to the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. He roomed in a heatless attic. Three or four precious hours of each day were spent waiting tables in a Chinese restaurant in New Haven. Whenever odd jobs could be found, his afternoons were given to them. Of course he won his Ph.D., for what institution could have resisted such a spirit as that? And, in addition, he won the warm affection and admiration of his fellows and of his instructors.

It was in keeping with the whole genius of his life that when he returned to China and to Fukien Chris-



*Dr. Francis Chen and his mother
and aunt.*

tian University he chose the most needy and the most difficult field of service he could find—that of rural reconstruction. On the faculty roll he is listed as a lecturer in economics—but among the farmers and villagers of Fukien province he is known as the enthusiastic leader who is helping them to transform their farms and villages in ways that not only make for greater material prosperity but that deepen and enrich their lives.

His smile is contagious. His is the spirit of the “superior man” of whom the sage Confucius said, “When the superior man acts like a brother, all men within the four seas become brothers.” His life is guided by that still greater Teacher, who gave as His supreme commandment, “Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and *thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*”



And so each of these three has, in his own way, shown himself to be a wise man—wise in his search for truth, wise in sharing his life with others. The lives of such as these call for men and women who, by their sacrificial gifts, will make possible the developing of more and more “wise men from the east” who will follow this same star.



A glimpse of the Fukien Christian University Campus.

PUBLISHED BY THE AMERICAN OFFICE OF
FUKIEN CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
150 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY

